

1 CORINTHIANS 4

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Be Intentional
Philippians 2:12-13
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PAUL CONTINUES IN HIS DISCUSSION OF THE MINISTRY BY GIVING THREE MORE PICTURES OF THE PASTOR:

I. THE STEWARD OF GOD'S WEALTH (4:1–7)

A STEWARD OWNED NOTHING; HE WAS A SLAVE WHO MANAGED HIS MASTER'S WEALTH. READ GEN. 24 FOR A PICTURE OF THE ORIENTAL STEWARD WHO HANDLED ABRAHAM'S WEALTH AND DID HIS BIDDING. NOTE ALSO LUKE 12:35FF; 15:1–8; 16:12–27, AND MATT. 25:14–30. THE PASTOR IS A SERVANT WHO IS A STEWARD. THE WORD "MINISTER" IN V. 1 IS LITERALLY "THE SLAVE WHO ROWS ON THE LOWEST LEVEL OF A BOAT." WHAT HUMILITY PAUL HAD!

A STEWARD'S RESPONSIBILITY IS TO BE FAITHFUL TO THE MASTER, AND THE PASTOR'S RESPONSIBILITY IS TO BE FAITHFUL TO TEACH THE THINGS OF THE LORD, ESPECIALLY THOSE TRUTHS THAT RELATE TO THE MYSTERY OF THE CHURCH. HE WILL BE JUDGED BY HIS OWN MASTER ACCORDING TO HIS FAITHFULNESS. HOW TRAGIC IT IS WHEN CHRISTIANS JUDGE DIFFERENT WORKERS AND COMPARE ONE WITH ANOTHER. IN VV. 3–5, PAUL PRESENTS THREE KINDS OF JUDGMENT: (1) THE JUDGMENT OF PEOPLE, WHICH HE DOES NOT FEAR; (2) SELF-JUDGMENT, AND HE SAYS HE "KNOWS NOTHING AGAINST HIMSELF" (NOT "BY" HIMSELF); AND (3) THE JUDGMENT OF GOD, WHICH IS THE ONLY TRUE JUDGMENT. THE CORINTHIANS WERE EVALUATING DIFFERENT SERVANTS OF GOD, COMPARING ONE WITH ANOTHER, AND THINKING THEMSELVES TO BE VERY SPIRITUAL. PAUL TOLD THEM THEY WERE CARNAL AND THAT THEIR JUDGMENT MEANT NOTHING TO A SPIRITUAL SERVANT OF GOD. A TRUE SERVANT OF GOD IS A STEWARD OF GOD'S WEALTH, AND HIS ONLY CONCERN IS PLEASING GOD, NOT MEN. AT THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST, GOD WILL REVEAL THE SECRETS AND GIVE OUT THE REWARDS, AND EVERY MAN WILL HAVE HIS OWN REWARD (3:8) AND HIS OWN GLORY FROM GOD (4:5). TO LIVE FOR THE PRAISE OF MEN IS TO BE FALSE TO OUR STEWARDSHIP.

IN VV. 6–7, PAUL SUMMARIZES THE WHOLE MATTER: THEY WERE NOT TO GO BEYOND THE WORD OF GOD AND TREAT MEN OTHER THAN AS SCRIPTURE ALLOWS. THEY WERE TO LOVE AND HONOR THEIR SPIRITUAL LEADERS, AND OBEY THEM AS THEY TEACH THE WORD; BUT TO COMPARE ONE LEADER WITH ANOTHER, OR TO GIVE GLORY TO ONE OVER ANOTHER, WAS CONTRARY TO GOD'S WORD AND HAD TO BE AVOIDED. AFTER ALL, IT IS GOD WHO MAKES ONE BELIEVER DIFFER FROM ANOTHER; EVERY GIFT A BELIEVER HAS COMES FROM GOD! WHO DARES TO BOAST OVER A GIFT?

II. A SPECTACLE TO THE WORLD (4:8–13)

THE WORLD AND ITS WISDOM ARE CONTRARY TO CHRIST AND HIS MINISTERS. PAUL USES SOME "LOVING SARCASM" HERE WHEN HE SAYS: "YOU CORINTHIANS BRAG ABOUT ONE ANOTHER AND COMPARE ONE MAN WITH ANOTHER, AS THOUGH YOU WERE KINGS ON A THRONE! HOW WONDERFUL IT MUST BE TO REIGN AS KINGS AND LOOK DOWN ON OTHERS! I WISH I COULD REIGN

WITH YOU. BUT, NO, I MUST BE A HATED APOSTLE, A SPECTACLE TO THE WORLD, A FOOL FOR CHRIST'S SAKE."

THE VERBAL PICTURE HE PAINTED WAS A FAMILIAR ONE TO THE PEOPLE OF PAUL'S DAY. WHENEVER A VICTORIOUS GENERAL CAME HOME FROM A WAR, HE WAS GIVEN A GLORIOUS PARADE THROUGH THE CITY STREETS. AS A WAY OF BOASTING, HE WOULD DISPLAY THE CAPTURED NOBLES AND GENERALS. AT THE VERY END OF THE PARADE CAME THE SOLDIERS WHO WERE TO BE THROWN TO THE WILD BEASTS IN THE ARENA. PAUL COMPARED HIMSELF AND THE OTHER APOSTLES TO THESE CAPTURED SOLDIERS, "APPOINTED TO DEATH FOR CHRIST'S SAKE," (VV. 9 AND 10) WHILE THE CORINTHIAN CHRISTIANS WERE BOASTING AT THE FRONT OF THE PARADE!

WHAT A SPECTACLE A TRUE SERVANT OF GOD MUST BE TO THE WORLD! PAUL COULD HAVE BEEN A GREAT JEWISH RABBI, WITH AUTHORITY AND ESTEEM; YET HE GAVE IT UP FOR CHRIST'S SAKE (PHIL. 3) TO HAVE HUNGER, NAKEDNESS, PERIL, AND DEATH! THE WORLD CANNOT UNDERSTAND THIS ATTITUDE AND CALLS SUCH A PERSON A FOOL. HOW CONVICTED THESE CORINTHIANS SHOULD HAVE BEEN WHEN THEY COMPARED THEIR CARNAL LIVING TO THE SACRIFICES PAUL AND THE OTHER APOSTLES WERE MAKING. PAUL WAS A FOOL; THEY WERE WISE. PAUL WAS WEAK; BUT THEY WERE STRONG. PAUL WAS HATED BY THE WORLD, BUT THEY WERE COURTING THE WORLD'S WISDOM. PAUL WENT SO FAR AS TO CALL HIMSELF THE "THE SCUM OF THE EARTH—THE WORLD'S GARBAGE" (V. 13).

THIS ATTITUDE OF HEART MUST BE SHARED BY CHRIST'S SERVANTS TODAY AS WELL. HOW EASY IT IS TO SETTLE DOWN AND LIVE LIKE THE WORLD, ACCEPTING THE WORLD'S STANDARDS AND COURTING THE WORLD'S HONORS, WHEN WE OUGHT TO BEWARE "WHEN ALL MEN SPEAK WELL OF US" (SEE LUKE 6:26).

III. A SPIRITUAL FATHER (4:14–21)

JESUS WARNS US THAT WE SHOULD CALL NO MAN ON EARTH "FATHER" (MATT. 23:9), BUT IT IS STILL TRUE THAT THOSE WHO LEAD SOULS TO CHRIST ARE, IN A SENSE, "FATHERING" THEM. (SEE 1 THES. 2:11.) PAUL HAD BEEN THEIR SPIRITUAL FATHER IN THAT HE GAVE THEM THE GOSPEL AND HELPED TO LEAD THEM TO CHRIST. A SINNER IS BORN INTO GOD'S FAMILY THROUGH THE SPIRIT OF GOD (JOHN 3:6) AND THE WORD OF GOD (1 PETER 1:23), BUT GOD USES HUMAN INSTRUMENTS TO BRING SINNERS THE GOSPEL. IT HAD BEEN PAUL'S "SPIRITUAL TRAVAIL" (GAL. 4:19) THAT HAD MADE POSSIBLE A CHURCH IN CORINTH.

THE MEN WHO FOLLOWED PAUL MAY HAVE BEEN THEIR INSTRUCTORS, BUT THE CORINTHIANS HAD ONLY ONE SPIRITUAL FATHER; THEY SHOULD HAVE SHOWED HIM MORE RESPECT AND LISTENED TO HIS WORD. PAUL HAD WARNED THEM ABOUT SIN, BUT THEY HAD FAILED TO LISTEN. NOW HE SENT TIMOTHY TO HELP THEM SETTLE THEIR CHURCH PROBLEMS; IF THAT DID NOT HELP, PAUL INTENDED TO COME HIMSELF. THEIR OWN ATTITUDE WOULD DETERMINE WHETHER HE WOULD COME WITH A FATHER'S ROD OF CORRECTION, OR WITH A WORD OF COMMENDATION AND APPROVAL. HISTORY TELLS US THAT THEY DID NOT LISTEN TO TIMOTHY, SO IT WAS NECESSARY FOR TITUS TO GO TO CORINTH.

SEVERAL TIMES IN THIS CHAPTER YOU FIND THE PHRASE "PUFFED UP," REFERRING TO THE CORINTHIANS' ATTITUDE OF SUPERIORITY AND CARNAL PRIDE (VV. 6, 18, AND SEE 5:2). WHAT MADE THEM "PUFFED UP"? WAS IT NOT THE LEAVEN OF SIN IN THEIR CHURCH (5:6)? AS THE YEAST OF SIN GREW, IT INFLATED THEM INTO A FALSE SPIRITUALITY; THEREFORE, PAUL FOUND IT NECESSARY TO

WARN THEM. THIS "PUFFED UP" ATTITUDE OFTEN REVEALS ITSELF IN MUCH TALKING. "PAUL WILL NEVER COME HERE!" THEY WERE SAYING (VV. 18–19). "HE WRITES STERN LETTERS AND TRIES TO SCARE US, BUT HE WILL NEVER COME BACK!" "BE CAREFUL!" WARNED THE APOSTLE. "TALK IS CHEAP! WHEN I DO COME, I WANT TO SEE HOW MUCH POWER THESE CHRISTIANS HAVE, AND NOT HOW MUCH THEY TALK. A CARNAL CHRISTIAN IS OFTEN A BRAGGING CHRISTIAN, BUT THERE IS NO DEMONSTRATION OF GOD'S SPIRIT IN HIS OR HER LIFE (SEE 2:4).

CERTAINLY IT GRIEVED PAUL'S HEART TO HAVE TO WRITE THIS WAY TO HIS SPIRITUAL CHILDREN, BUT HE HAD TO BE FAITHFUL. JUST AS PARENTS MUST WARN AND CHASTEN THEIR CHILDREN, SO "SPIRITUAL FATHERS" MUST WARN AND DISCIPLINE THE CHILDREN OF GOD IN LOVE. THIS IS NOT AN ENJOYABLE EXPERIENCE, BUT IT IS A NECESSARY ONE.

THESE TWO CHAPTERS ILLUSTRATE THE PROPER ATTITUDE OF THE CHURCH TOWARD ITS SPIRITUAL LEADERS. SUCH CHRISTIANS SHOULD THANK GOD FOR THEM, PRAY FOR THEM, LOVE THEM, HONOR THEM, AND OBEY THE WORD WHICH THEY TEACH AND FOLLOW THEMSELVES. THERE MUST NEVER BE IN A CHURCH A WORLDLY ATTITUDE OF EXALTING MEN AND MINISTRIES. THE PASTOR MINISTERS THE WORD, SOWS THE SEED, BUILDS THE TEMPLE, DISPENSES THE MYSTERIES OF GOD, SUFFERS SHAME BEFORE THE WORLD, AND LOVINGLY FATHERS THE CHURCH FAMILY. THESE ARE GREAT RESPONSIBILITIES, AND ONLY THE SUFFICIENCY OF GOD ENABLES ANYONE TO FULFILL THEM.